

Message Text

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21

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 SSM-03 SAM-01 /079 W

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R 130805Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2667

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 1417

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR MU

SUBJECT: VISIT OF SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTER TO OMAN

1. VISIT OF SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTER NAYIF BIN ABD AL-AZIZ TO OMAN NOV 6-9 WAS HIGHLIGHTED PROMINENTLY HERE, AS OMANI OFFICIALDOM OBVIOUSLY GIVEN SIGNAL TO PLAY UP TO THIS IMPORTANT EMISSARY OF RIYAD. NAYIF STAYED IN PALACE GUEST QUARTERS AND HAD BUSY ROUNG OF HIGH-LEVEL CALLS, INCLUDING SULTAN, AND BANQUETS. HE SPENT SOME TIME WITH OMANI POLICE FORCE AND TRAVELED BRIEFLY TO DHOFAR.

2. NO SPECIAL PURPOSE BEING ATTRIBUTED TO THE VISIT, APART FROM APPARENT DESIRE OF SAUDIS TO TALK TO OMANIS AS WELL AS OTHER ARAB STATES ALONG GULF BEFORE UPCOMING FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING. OFFICIAL WORD ON BOTH SIDES IS THAT NAYIF RESPONDING TO ROUTINE INVITATION FROM HIS OMANI COUNTERPART,
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SAYYID MUHAMMED BIN AHMED, BUT KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS

GIVE LITTLE CREDENCE THIS VERSION AND ATTRIBUTE INITIATIVE ALMOST ENTIRELY TO SAUDIS. BELIEF IS THAT SAUDIS WISH ENSURE THAT THEIR VIEW OF COMMON GULF POLICY, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING SECURITY, IS CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD AND THAT IT IS SUPPORTED BY THE PERIPHERAL STATES AT THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON WAYS TO HANDLE INTERNAL SUBVERSIVE THREATS ALSO SAID TO BE ON NAYIF'S AGENDA, THIS BEING A MATTER OF CURRENT CONCERN AS RADICALS IN REGION ARE KNOWN TO BE REASSESSING THEIR OPTIONS AFTER DHOFAR WAR. OMANIS BELIEVE THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER IN THIS FIELD, SINCE THEY ARE ONLY STATE IN REGION HAVING FOUGHT A COMMUNIST-BACKED INSURGENCY.

3. PROMINENT TREATMENT GIVEN NAYIF'S VISIT BY OMANIS ALSO MOTIVATED BY EVER-PRESENT NEED MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH SAUDI BIG BROTHER IN SPITE OF BILATERAL PROBLEMS. THESE PROBLEMS ARE SO FAR MINOR COMPARED TO OVERRIDING COMMON INTEREST OF REGION'S CONSERVATIVE MONARCHIES, BUT THEY ARE NEVERTHELESS PESKY AND GROWING. WE UNDERSTAND SAUDIS HAVE RECENTLY PEPPERED OMANGOV WITH LOW-KEY PROTEST NOTES COMPLAINING OF BORDER VIOLATIONS. WHEN OMANIS LOOK INTO THESE, MOST INVOLVE EVENTS IN WHAT OMANGOV CONSIDERS ITS OWN TERRITORY. MOREOVER, ALTHOUGH SAUDI REQUEST FOR CESSION OF CORRIDOR IN DHOFAR TO BUILD PIPELINE TO ARABIAN SEA IS NOT BEING PUSHED, OMANIS WONDER IF RIYADH HAS REALLY DROPPED THE SCHEME. EVEN SAUDI DIPLOMATIC OVERTURES TO PDRY CAUSE CONCERN; OMANIS PROFESS TO SEE IN THEM NOT ONLY WISH TO HELP OMAN BY EASING ADEN'S INTEREST IN DHOFAR INSURGENCY, WHICH THEY DID ACCOMPLISH TO A DEGREE, BUT ALSO IN LONGER TERMS SAUDI EFFORT CULTIVATE ALTERNATIVE FRIEND IN SOUTH. MEANWHILE, OMANI REQUEST FOR SAUDI AID IN DHOFAR IS BEING MET BY SAUDI FOOT-DRAGGING.

4. EXTENT TO WHICH OMANGOV AND NAYIF SUCCEEDED IN ALLAYING THESE TROUBLES DURING VISIT IS UNCERTAIN. NOTHING CONCRETE IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC AID TO DHOFAR SEEMS TO HAVE EMERGED, THOUGH OMANIS MAY HAVE KEPT ISSUE ALIVE. IN GENERAL, ALL THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED SEEMS TO BE SAUDI SUCCESS IN FURBISHING THEIR ROLE AS MAIN POLICY-MAKER AMONG ARABS IN GULF, AND OMANI SUCCESS IN BENDING MORE OR LESS GRACEFULLY TO THIS PRESSURE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MINISTERIAL VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MartinML
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MUSCAT01417
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760424-1072
From: MUSCAT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761151/aaaabrj.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MartinML
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <08 SEP 2004 by MartinML>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VISIT OF SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTER TO OMAN
TAGS: PINS, PFOR, MU, (AZIZ, NAYIF BIN ABD AL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006